

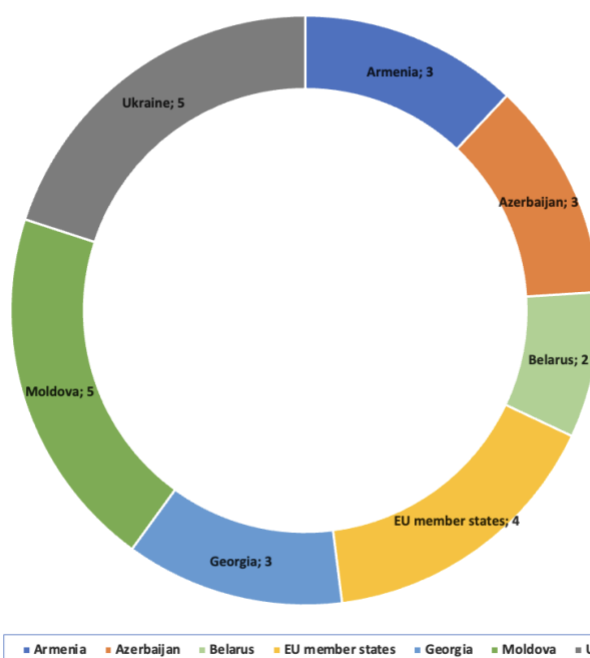
Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Working Group 3

Online Meeting, 6 July 2023

Report

EaP CSF Working Group 3 (WG3) met online on 6 July 2023. Spread over three online sessions, the meeting began with individual country updates and a brainstorming exercise on joint policy priorities. In the second session, the EaP CSF Secretariat staff members provided a comprehensive overview of the activities organised throughout the first half of 2023 at the Forum and reminded delegates about the joint advocacy opportunities offered by the organisation. In the third and last session, delegates had the opportunity to discuss the state of affairs in the field of energy cooperation with a representative from the European Commission (DG Energy). 25 participants (delegates from the 6 EaP countries and the EU as well as local WG coordinators) attended the meeting.

Distribution of WG3 participants [delegates and local WG3 coordinators]
6 July 2023



Session 1 – Introduction and Country Updates

Thursday 6 July, 09:00-11:00 CEST

The introductory session began with the introduction of **Olena Pavlenko** as a newly elected EaP WG3 Coordinator, followed by opening remarks from her fellow Working Group 3 Coordinator,

Ana Otilia Nutu, and short presentations of the country-level developments by WG3 coordinators from the 6 national platforms (NP) of the EaP CSF. In an ensuing brainstorming exercise, delegates clarified national policy priorities, finding that the environmental repercussions of the war in Ukraine, climate adaptation plans, and educational work on a local level are shared priorities. Delegates identified transnational projects as a potential way forward for civil society to tackle these common challenges.

Country Updates

Ana Otilia Nutu gave an overview of regional developments in the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) policy. She briefly reminded WG3 delegates about the changes in the EaP policy, highlighting that the EaP architecture is no longer in place and has been replaced by a lighter structure that has an extended reach out including neighbouring regions of the EaP and the EU such as the Western Balkans and Central Asia. Although bilateral tracks between the EU and its Eastern partners prevail, multilateral cooperation will remain. Yet, defence and security, especially in the support of Ukraine, and physical infrastructure projects are increasingly becoming more prominent. The Middle Corridor, as an alternative transport route to the Northern Corridor through Russia, has been elevated to a key project for interconnectivity between the EU, EaP countries and Asia. Thus, amid these geopolitical changes, WG3 – and civil society in general – will need to ensure that environment, climate action and an enabling environment for civil society overall remain present in the policy discussions at all levels.

Mari Chakryan (Armenia) suggested that the new subject of cybersecurity should be reflected in future WG3 meetings as well. For Armenia, the main challenges remain in the areas of the mining industry, air pollution and community safety. Mari Chakryan highlighted the daily work of the local Working Group 3 in participating in the legislative reforms that align the country's legislative framework with the Comprehensive Trade and Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed with the EU. For example, the Armenian WG3 produced statements and legislative recommendations for the government and worked on awareness-raising campaigns at the local level. Moreover, NP members are involved in the coordination of INDC (Intended Nationally Determined Contribution to the UNCCFC) tasks, with a focus on climate change adaptation policies. In terms of energy security, the Armenian WG actively promotes the utilisation of solar energy and the protection of public interests, especially for social minority groups. Six NP member organisations participate in the EU4Dialogue programme on water, energy and climate change. Regarding the future EaP policy, Mari Chakryan stressed the need to increase the presence of CSOs in policy debates and subject matter events. Their pivotal role can be seen in the way energy market reforms in Armenia have been shaped, where civil society has had a key role in spreading information and raising awareness.

Sevil Yuzbasheva (Azerbaijan) emphasised the dramatic consequences of climate change felt by the country, such as droughts and heat waves. Efforts are underway to reduce the carbon emission and environmental degradation caused by the national oil sector, for instance, by prioritizing gas over oil and building water and heat power plants. The government committed to the targets of the Paris Agreement and aims at improving energy efficiency. WG3 of the Azerbaijani NP decided to focus on monitoring renewable energy projects and collecting data on

solar, wind and hydropower plants. Yet, monitoring efforts are encountered with obstacles such as the need to receive permits for entering those power plants. The monitoring results are so far positive and predict that Azerbaijan is on track to fulfilling its obligations to increase the use of renewable energy sources to 35% by 2030. Other WG3 participants inquired whether Azerbaijan takes steps for carbon capture of methane emitted by the oil industry, to which Sevil Yuzbasheva answered that the practice of burning flares has been stopped by the oil industry.

Uladzimir Zuyeu (Belarus) reflected upon the suffering of environmental organisations under the all-out liquidation of independent CSOs in Belarus. While environmental laws look appropriate on paper, governmental policies are not transparent; large-scale environmental harm and ecological disasters are potentially downplayed by the government. With EU sanctions placed on Belarus, businesses have become detached from the European Green Deal and European initiatives on circular economy. Most environmental activists relocated to Lithuania, Poland or Georgia. Yet, online and offline meetings continue, including the drafting of a vision for a new, green Belarus. Uladzimir Zuyeu emphasized that this vision is not thought of as a long-term perspective but guided by expectations of governmental change taking place soon; a set of draft documents form an Action Plan for a democratic Belarus. Belarusian WG3 members regularly prepare reports on different policy areas and work with Ukrainian experts to monitor the war's environmental impact.¹ Belarusian members also work with social networks to campaign and raise awareness, for example, on microplastics. The “green phone” initiative, facilitated through messenger services and email, provides environmental consulting to civil society. A main priority is to improve the education system and provide trainings, so that a new generation of environmental professionals is educated.

Nino Chkobadze and Giorgi Mukhigulishvili (Georgia) presented the country update repalcing Georgian WG3 coordinators. They shared an evaluation of the implementation of the EU Association Agreement (AA), highlighting its negative track record in environmental protection and climate actions. Despite having a mitigation plan, Georgia lacks an adaptation plan; the ministry agreed with donors to work on such an adaptation plan over the next three years. Georgian civil society raises these problems in their consultations with members of parliament – and hopes remain that NGOs can stimulate governmental action. Action is needed, as the impact of climate change becomes visible in Georgia and across the Caucasus region: landslides, droughts, floods. Georgia faces problems with infrastructure development and the reconstruction of roads. Nevertheless, environmental legislation is moving on: a new law on water protection; an energy efficiency law being implemented this year; and a new law on emission that will enter into force in 2026. The government is developing a National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) – and WG3 asked the Ministry of environmental protection to disclose deliberations. The NECP is expected to be published in September. A core weakness remains the access to information for civil society. Fortunately, recently the ministry inaugurated a new information-sharing platform, which is expected to become functional very soon. In terms of energy mix, Georgia needs to focus on renewable resources, mainly wind and solar; hydropower is considered less of a sustainable – yet still necessary – option due to shrinking water resources. A key challenge is the integration of energy systems and synchronisation with neighbouring countries.

¹ See Ukraine War Environmental Consequences Work Group, <https://uwecworkgroup.info>.

In this regard, the Middle Corridor gains attention; a feasibility study for a submarine Black Sea power line, which would be used for free flows of green energy, is underway.

Lilia Curchi (Moldova) provided an overview the most important updates on climate action, energy security and environment protection in the Republic of Moldova, reporting that environmental protection has become a top-level policy. The government approved a national afforestation plan in 2023², which had been developed through extensive public and expert consultations. A second national priority is waste management, where projects are set up with the support of donors such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), European Investment Bank (EIB), and the Eastern Europe Energy Efficiency and Environment Partnership (E5P), where the EU is the largest donor. Moldova needs to move forward and embrace the principles of circular economy – at present, 90% of national waste still ends up in landfills. A third national priority is the improvement of water quality. Overall, the harmonisation of national legislation with the EU acquis is moving on, with a law on environmental pollution payments currently under modification to reduce plastic waste. In terms of climate change, Moldova experiences prolonged periods of droughts, dried-up rivers, and torrential rains. Civil society and the expert community participate in the development of a climate action plan, with public consultations scheduled for July 2023. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine also carried a heavy impact on Moldova, not only for the diversification of the energy sector but also in the environmental sphere: more wild animals are observed to migrate over to the Moldovan terrain and forests. The disastrous Nova-Kakhovka dam explosion, once again, showed the pertinence of developing contingency plans and national corridors for animals. For energy security, last winter's energy crisis and policy response provide lessons learned. Here, a key policy area is to improve energy efficiency in the residential sector and public buildings; Moldova requested an expert opinion on this from the European Union. With regard to the involvement of civil society, Lilia Curchi highlighted the role of NGOs operating on the local level, stressing the need for international donors to step up their core support.

Nataliya Andrushevych (Ukraine) shared first-hand experiences from the war of aggression against Ukraine carried out by Russia for more than 500 days; only a few hours prior to the WG3 meeting, missiles rained down on Lviv, causing damage and loss of lives 300 meters from her office. The war has a strong impact on the environment – polluting air, water and fauna. The explosion of the Nova-Kakhovka dam deeply affected the surrounding nature reserve fund, the Black Sea biosphere reserve, and about 80 settlements. Destruction and occupation cut the country off from important energy sources: 80% of its nuclear power generation, 78% of thermal power capacity, 12% of hydropower, 32% of gas stations, and 80% of wind energy production. At the same time, EU candidate status and postwar reconstruction process influence the overall environment and climate policy of Ukraine. The implementation of the EU acquis will ensure red lines for reconstruction projects and helps rebuild Ukraine based on green principles. So far, the recent assessments by the European Commission reveal a low level of implementation of the EU's environmental acquis – and a good level for the energy sector. Currently, the national government conducts a self-assessment of legislation compliance with the EU body of directives and

² See <https://gov.md/en/content/moldovan-government-approves-national-programme-extension-rehabilitation-forests-2023-2032>

regulations. This shows that, despite the war, reforms continue at a steady level, albeit not as progressive as civil society hopes for. A new water strategy for 2050 was adopted, as well as plans and framework laws for flood risk management, waste management, industrial pollution (Sevilla process), chemical safety, a biomethane register, a new energy safety strategy, and a concept for green bond markets.

The scope of international obligations, nevertheless, is wider than the EU acquis. Multiple international partners are actively developing postwar recovery plans in Ukraine. One of the main challenges remains that information on the state of the energy sector and environmental data is not accessible; instruments of public participation (EIA, SEA) do not work fully; and the national energy strategy differs from discussions with partners abroad. A key critique is that green energy initiatives should focus more on domestic consumption, and not only energy exports. Ukrainian WG3 initiatives include a shadow report on national environmental policy, an assessment of critical raw materials, and a joint project with Georgian counterparts on governmental policy monitoring. Policy papers are to be published in September-October this year. WG3 members implement initiatives on recovery and reconstructing and surveying war damages.

Brainstorming: Shared Priorities for WG3

In a short but productive brainstorming session, WG3 members discussed topics uniting all EaP members and to be developed into projects in the months to come, especially at the Annual Assembly in October. **Thereby, climate change, the environmental impact of the war in Ukraine, and educational work were identified as top priorities.** Moreover, the implementation of the **European Green Deal** is a shared agenda with the European Union.

Nataliya Andrushevykh (Ukraine) shared some positive experiences on **cross-border projects** with Georgian and Moldovan counterparts in monitoring government action.³ Amalia Hambartsumyan (Armenia) also reported on transnational community projects in remote areas, which have been explored together with Georgian colleagues. She suggested the organisation of a conference with local communities and a program for structured transnational civil society cooperation.⁴

For **Armenia**, energy security is a major concern. In **Azerbaijan**, natural disaster risk management, adaptation measures and educational work take front seats. For **Belarus**, first of all, the war in Ukraine showed how much former Soviet states still depend on outdated Soviet infrastructure and technology; therefore, the focus should be on Ukraine's transformation and reconstruction. Second, Belarus needs action on climate mitigation and adaptation. And third, as for Azerbaijan, educational work and advocacy on the community level need increased efforts.

Georgian representatives stressed the need for a common approach to man-made and natural disasters, and suggested that delegates of the EaP CSF Annual Assembly should adopt a resolution condemning instrumentalizations of Hydro-Power Plants, and other energy infrastructure, by

³ See Resource and Analysis Center (2022): "Good Environmental Governance Implementation in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine: State of Play, key conclusions and recommendations (Policy Paper)", accessible [here](#).

⁴ See proposal documents shared with WG3 by NGO Khazer (attached to this report distributed to WG3).

warring parties. Other priorities are climate adaptation, formal and informal education, and the further development of energy and transport corridors across the region, mainly through the Middle Corridor.

In **Moldova**, Russia's war elevated energy security and independence to the top priority. Civil society eyes the building of nuclear power plants with scepticism, and the demand for renewables increased. For **Ukraine**, national concerns are inextricably linked to ending the war that defines energy security and environmental protection. Striving to become an EU member, the implementation of the European Green Deal serves as an overall policy framework. The mainstreaming of the European Green Deal into regional policy agendas and respective monitoring by civil society could serve as a departure for future joint initiatives in WG3.

Session 2 – Joint advocacy opportunities within the EaP CSF

Thursday 6 July, 11:30-12:30 CEST

Tania Marocchi, Policy and Advocacy Manager at the EaP CSF Secretariat, reported to the delegates EaP CSF activities since the Annual Assembly and on internal updates. She reported on two key decisions taken at the SC meeting in Brussels in April: a) to extend the mandate of current EaP CSF delegates; b) the announcement of a new call for delegates before the end of 2023.

Further issues and projects presented by Secretariat staff members **Tania Marocchi**, **Kristina Pitalskaia**, **Alexandra Sabou** and **Pascal Willaumez** were:

- New staff members at the Secretariat
- WG Coordinator elections in WG2, WG3 and WG5
- Operational Capacity Assessment (OCA) of the EaP CSF and its NPs
- Implementation of Gender Mainstreaming Strategy (GMS)
 - GMS vision note adopted by the SC in April 2023
 - Gender focus points to be established, including NPs
 - Gender subgroups to be established at NP-level by 2024
- SHAPEDEM-EU (new Horizon Europe project in which EaP CSF is a partner alongside other international organisations, “Rethinking and reshaping the EU’s democracy support in its Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods” more [here](#))
 - Pilot project “Democracy Learning Loop”
 - Living labs
 - Podcast
- External advocacy
 - Public events
 - Ad hoc advocacy
 - Contribution to EP reports and resolutions
 - Public statements
- Human Rights Dialogues
- Podcast cooperation with New Eastern Europe (journal)

- EaP Index (launch in autumn 2023)
- Annual Assembly (November 2023, Brussels)

Session 3 – Stakeholder meeting. Strengthening the environment and climate resilience in the EaP region: the EU’s vital role in promoting common standards and meeting energy demands

Thursday 6 July, 14:00-15:00 CEST

In the stakeholder session, WG3 members discussed with Cyril Loisel, International Relations Officer at the Commission’s Directorate-General for Energy (DG ENER), the current state of energy affairs within the EU and EaP region. The discussion showed that, while increased policy alignments materialise, cooperation takes different directions with individual EaP countries.

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine ushered dramatic changes, and above all, the weaponisation of energy supplies. Thus, the European Commission set up the “REPowerEU” plan for reducing energy demands and diversifying supplies away from Russian fuels.⁵ International partnerships – with, among others, Norway, Algeria, Egypt, the United States and Azerbaijan – and regional cooperation helped avoid worst-case scenarios, namely, the breakdown of European energy systems. Gas storage is being refilled currently. The EU also supported EaP countries – namely Ukraine and Moldova – by connecting regional electricity grids and supplying gas via reverse flows. REPowerEU’s platform for industrial gas supplies is also open for members of the Energy Community, to which Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine are signatory partners, as long as no gas of Russian origin is traded. The prospects of reducing Russian gas, including Russian LNG and supplies through Türkiye, were discussed.⁶ WG3 members expressed their concerns that the Russian nuclear energy sector is not covered by EU sanctions and suggested targeted advocacy work with individual EU member states.

The recourse to coal has had a negative impact on climate goals, and the transition to renewables is a main concern. Fortunately, energy efficiency improved remarkably over the past decade. Energy markets are becoming more competitive – but face infrastructural challenges. The EU works on expanding the connectivity with Eastern neighbours, including the Black Sea region. Here, Azerbaijan and Georgia signed a quadrilateral “Agreement on a Strategic Partnership in the Field of Green Energy Development and Transmission” with Romania and Hungary in late 2022.⁷ The cooperation envisions a nearly 1,200-kilometer underwater cable under the Black Sea from

⁵ See European Commission: “REPowerEU”, accessible [here](#).

⁶ See also Bruegel Policy Brief: “The EU can manage without Russian liquefied natural gas”, 28.06.2023, accessible [here](#).

⁷ See Caucasus Watch: “Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania, and Hungary Sign Agreement on Development and Transmission of Green Energy”, 18.12.2022, accessible [here](#).

Georgia to Romania, and the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding has been endorsed by the European Commission.⁸

A further concern is the inclusion of human rights and transparency as conditions for enhanced energy cooperation between the EU and Azerbaijan. With Azerbaijan leaving the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in 2017,⁹ civil society lost an important platform where independent voices have had an impact on the government and international energy producers. Therefore, it is crucial to get Baku back into negotiation and rejoin EITI. If the EU is going to develop stronger cooperation with Eastern partners, the oversight of civil society will be needed to make sure that revenues from energy partnerships will not lead to similar effect as it has been with Russia; revenues from EU markets must not end up in payrolling wars of aggression.

Conclusions

Ana Otilia Nutu and Olena Pavlenko, WG3 coordinators, wrapped up the WG3 meeting, reminding the delegates of articulating top policy priorities across the region in preparation for the Annual Assembly (November 2023, Brussels) including a WG3 meeting planned back-to-back with the Forum's key event of the year.



⁸ See European Commission: “Statement by President von der Leyen at the signing ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding for the development of the Black Sea Energy submarine cable”, 17.12.2023, accessible [here](#).

⁹ See Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI): “Azerbaijan’s notice of withdrawal”, March 2017, accessible [here](#).